

SOME

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REFLECTIONS

On the Eleventh SECTION of

Dr. D'AVENANTS

Late Book of ESSAYS,

Intituled,

Peace at Home, and War Abroad,

IN A

LETTER

TO A

MEMBER

OF THE

Honourable House of Commons.

Printed in the Year, 1704.

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IN RESPONSE TO A

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S I R,

Hearing you speak of some the other Day, who you said were lately gone off, I was curious to look into Dr. D'avenant's last Book; but finding it very large, considering, what I judg'd, was the occasion, I began and ended with Sec. Of Religion and Liberty of Conscience. There I met with what I thought proper to Communicate to you, if greater and lesser Business has hinder'd you from Perusing the Author your self. I know Sir, you have entertain'd a favourable Opinion of him, and some of his Works, which make me concern'd while I declare to a Person of your Sincerity and Stedfastness, that I verily believe

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believe, the chief Opinions in this Essay, are either lately taken up, or have been long Conceal'd: Though I will not say these are the Doctor's own avow'd Principles; God forbid I should, he may have still a further Reserve, or may have been unwarrily Betray'd by an Intended Apology for himself, into a Satyr against Religion, and the Church of England. But Words must bear their own Weight, and to be plain with you, I think the Essay cannot be clear'd from representing *all Religion as a meer Engine of State, and the Church of England as not to be trusted with a thorough Establishment in England.*

The Essay begins with an Observation, which, at first sight, in my Opinion, portended no good to Religion; it is *Machiavel's* Observation, that the Greatness of Rome was chiefly owing to *Numa's* Care, in Seasoning the Peoples Minds with Religious Notions. *Matchiavel's* Design in this Observation is well known; and it is here propos'd without Restriction or Limitation, with regard to the Principles he went upon, which methinks, became a Christian Writer to do: I am sure he need have Express'd himself no otherwise than he has done, had he indeed intended to recommend *Matchiavillian* Policy. Now if Religion be only *Craft* in the Governour, it can be little better in the Priest, and at best but *Humour* and *Delusion* in the People; our Author, I apprehend, has let drop an Expression or two tending this way: *Are Religions* (says he, p. 259.) *true or false so ready to Reform, unless they are driven to it by some Motive or Impulse more than ordinary?* This is either to mistake Religion for Bigotry, or to represent them as one and the same thing. Opinions that owe their Being to bare Authority, and Imagination, are Naturally incorrigible; where Reason had nothing to do in the Choice, no wonder it is Excluded

cluded the *Management*; but a Religion founded in Truth, is of all things, in it self, the aptest to Reform, where it needs a Reformation. But 'tis possible he does not talk here abstractedly of *Religion*, but of the *Religious*; and indeed he's pretty concise in his Characters of them, he declares (p. 227.) *There are few Separations from the Establish'd Religion of a Country, which had not their beginning from the Ignorance and Vices of the Priesthood.* Such Language as this (to let the Calumny pass) has been look'd upon, in all other Authors that used it, as a Dart aim'd at Religion, through the Side of its Ministers, and I don't find our Author laying in Caution to exempt his own Case.

But these are only little Skirmishes, and this way of Writing is grown so Common, that a Modish Author may hit upon't, without much Design; and so I shou'd have thought our Essay-Writer had done, but that I find the main Body of his chief Argument pointed this way. It is what he Pleads concerning the Expediency of your present Bill to prevent Occasional Conformity. The Reflection I am making does not engage me in the Merits of that Cause; you, I know have deliberately form'd, and settled your Judgement upon it. But this I fear, that his Argument is no further conclusive, than as it is Founded on the Supposition that Religion is a *passive Instrument of State*; You will give me leave to show it in both Shapes, as a *Matchiavellian*, and as a *Christian* Argument. To which purpose, I may reasonably suppose that the Essay takes for granted, the Practice of Occasional Conformity to be in it self, Hypocritical; this I may reasonably Presume, though he does not expressly assert so much, because in so Elaborate an Apology, he says not one word to defend the Practice in it self, and because he does suppose it Hypo-

critical, (p. 242.) And lastly, because I believe Dr. *D'avenant* understands the true State of the Case, here therefore, is in one Scale, a Practice Evil in it self, the other he endeavours to lead with many Imaginary *Inconveniences* that may happen, and Disturbances that may be given thereby to the State; or, as he modestly expresses it, (p. 260.) *Whether such a Restraint upon Dissenters will do good or hurt, is at least, Dubious.* Now, I say, upon supposition that our Religion is really the Revelation of God, and that by Him Kings Reign, and Princes Decree Justice, there is no Weight in this Argument; for if *Id tantum possumus quod jure possumus*; then it is not in the Power of any Government to Connive at, where it can animadvert upon the Publick and Notorious Breach of the *Moral Law* of God for any Temporary Inconvenience *foreseen*, much less *Dubiously* suspected; for Instance, Should they not Punish a Lying Pamphleteer, Detected, and Convicted, only for fear of disobliging the Party he Lied for? Believe me, Sir, Hypocrisie is the worst sort of Lying, and Dissimulation with God the worst sort of Hypocrisie. But whatever Allowances are due to the Frailty of all Humane Governours in particular Cases, yet when the Case becomes National, and every Man has a Capacity of being Included in it; when, especially by this means the Administration of Justice it self is enter'd upon by the Door of Hypocrisie, what shall we say to this case, if one part of the Original Institution of Government makes it a *Terror to Evil Doers*? Sir, you observe I speak this upon the Doctor's own Supposition; for I hope all those of the Body, who are against such a Law, are, some way or other perswaded that the Practice of Occasional Conformity is in it self Innocent.

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This then as a *Christian* Argument will not do; but as the *Matchiavellian* Argument, it has the usual Strength and Ennergy of our Author's Reasoning. Here Government, the main End, is secured (I mean according to another supposition of his) and Religion, the subordinate means, laid aside in such Instances, wherein it casually loses its natural tendency to this End; it being highly reasonable in this Case, that dubious, ill Consequences upon the State should out-balance the most Fundamental Maxims of Religion.

I know very well, that you, Sir, and many others are of Opinion that other Supposition of his is false; that Publick Faith ought no more to be suffer'd to pass Counterfeit-ed, than Publick Coin; and that for Natural Consequences on the well or ill-Being of the State, but I only crave leave to say, That when Statesmen do thus, in effect, Exclude God and his Laws from their Schemes of Government, they may Essay all their Life-time on future Consequences, as the present Juncture shall require; but I fear a Government supported only by such fashionable Notions, may sometime or other be in danger of going out of Fashion with them.

I must not Conceal it, that the Dr. talks elsewhere more Religiously; particularly, p. 218. he says, *there is not a greater Sign of Imminent Ruin, than when God and his Worship are despis'd.* I hope this was spoken sincerely, and there I must leave the Dr. to Reconcile the Matter; but still I must say this may only be a piece of Compliance with a Vulgar mode of Speech; every Man has his God, but every Man does not mean the same thing by that Word; no Man speaks more Reverently of God than Mr. *Blount*, and that his God was only *Nature*, and I wish our Authors be any thing more than *Government*.

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But here I cannot forbear showing you by the way, how Consistently this Scheme hangs together, p. 242. he puts this Plea into the Mouth of his *Occasional Conformist*. *If we Sin by Hypocrisie, there is a God to Inflict his Vengeance on us.* But p. 250. It is laid down as an ill Consequence of Enacting this Law against such Conformists, that *meer Hypocrites will crowd in apace.* Now these passages put together will make a Noble Argument of it. The constant Conformist for a Place, (who in his Heart is a Dissenter) is guilty of an Hypocrisie which no Humane Law can reach; and therefore the Legislative Power is bid to guard against him: The Occasional Conformist (who is as much a Dissenter as the other) is guilty of an Hypocrisie within the Cognisance of Humane Laws; and for that our Author will have him left to the *Vengeance of God.*

He has been as unlucky in *Instancing* as in *Collecting*, p. 237. *Henry III. of France*, abating the Rigour of his Laws against the *Hugonots*, *Gave them to understand that as they were to fear no hurt, so they were to expect no Favour from him; He shut them out from the Management of Affairs, by a general Care in the Executive Power, &c. this perverted more from the truth in three or four Years, then all the Cruelty that had been before suggested, by Priests, to him, &c.* This Instance does plead, as it was intended, for a Toleration; but the Mischief of it is, it Pleads for a *bare Toleration*; nay ascribes all the good Effects to that Limitation, *They were to expect no Favour, Protection* once granted, it's Natural for men to seek for *Favour*; and this wrought that Conversion, without which Favour *was not* to be gain'd. I wou'd undertake to maintain this Passage against all that follows to the End of the Essay, both as a *good*, and as a *Contradictory Argument.* What

What think you of another Argument to support the Drs. Notion? p. 254. The Dissenters (excluded by your Bill) *will by a Perpetual tending of their thoughts to business, grow Rich apace; for wealth begets Respect, and much Property cannot be long without some Power, whereas, (he should have proceeded) as the case now stands, they, good Men! are perpetually bent on the Publick Weal.*

But this, Sir, is not my Business with you now; I am next to let you know his Opinion of the Church of England. And indeed I cannot see how a just Discourse, of the length of this Essay, could admit of an Invektive against Persecution from, p. 233. to p. 242. without supposing ours a persecuting Church. Next be pleas'd to take the Character of those Church Men who plead for an Establishment of the Church, p. 234. *But tho' the Cause of God is thus pretended, is not the Corruption of Nature at the bottom of all this? Have not the best of Men still retain'd so much of Human Frailty, that they are loath to take the pains of Subduing Sects and Heresy's by their own Piety, Charity, devout Lives, painful Preaching and Holy Examples? And do they not desire to use Power and Force, the Arms of Flesh, because they are not strong enough in Vertue to wield Spiritual Arms; and has not all this been the Original of Persecution.* I would only ask our Polititian, who sees the length of so many Consequences, whether, supposing the best of our Church Men were very Samsons in Vertue, Sects and Heresy's would be thereby Subdued? Yes sure, for we were told before that *there are few Separations which had not their beginning from the Ignorance and Vices of the Priest-Hood.* All this while there's no hard Word, or ill Language offer'd to the Sectary or Heretick; he has
no

no share of the Blame; I find, when a Disputant Acts the *Swiss*, it's easie to guess who's his Master. In the mean time, methinks this course Fare is but ill Dress'd up for the Court of Her Sacred Majesty, who has had Experience, in her private Capacity, what some of the best of Men are; She will not, I verily believe be thus far Impos'd upon.

The Inferiour Clergy fall next under his Lash; they, *p. 227. When the Check of their Bishops is not upon them, are apt to run into Excesses of all Kinds*, and then almost all kind of Excesses are Charg'd upon them; which *aptness* of theirs plainly demonstrates that they are not Acted in any part of their Spiritual Function, by the Fear of God, or a Sense of their Duty. Nay, as if a Church-Principle were enough to Debauch a Lay-Man; *Loose Livers* is the universal Character of those, who, in the late times of Rebellion, fought for the Church. (*p. 218.*) When thus in our Author's Sence, *There is none that doth Good, no not one.* I don't wonder to find the whole Body of the Church utterly Corrupt in its Principles, as we have it, (*p. 231.*) They gave an Instance, that they did not think themselves so Bound by their Doctrine of Passive Obedience, but that they could shake it off, when they saw it made use of by their Sovereign, to introduce Arbitrary Power, and undermine Religion. Are such Vicious, Debauch'd, Hypocritical, and Perjur'd Wretches to be trusted, think you, with an Establishment? Or can there be Peace at Home, while they are suffered to Enjoy the common Benefits of the Society? To finish this Character, he Addresses himself to all the Worthy Gentlemen of your Opinion in the House. You will not be offended to hear what may be said on the other Side; Especially when it comes from one who has given so many Proofs of his firm Adherence, as well to the Interest, as the Doctrine of the Church of England. Now Sir, if you think there has been enough, and

(9)
too much said in the Essay, against both the *Interest*, and the *Doctrine* of the Church of *England*, you can Construe this but one way : And it must be confess'd, that a *Complice* is a well-qualified *Evidence*.

I have Rak'd together no more of this vile Stuff than was requisite to make you think as I do of the Essay. I have wonder'd some times why some Men could not change Sides, but they must be giving the World the Reason of it ; especially when there is one obvious Reason which superceeds the necessity of any other : Such Apologies are generally Fruitless, their Friends know better things, their Enemies will believe none that are good of them, and Standers-by will easily see their Play.

But let others give you the *true* Reason, I am only concerned our Author has not given a *good* one ; and truly it moves me with Pity and Indignation to see an handsome Pen Prostituted, just as it does to see a Charming Woman Common. But I grow downright angry at those *Renegadoes*, who, at every turn will be carrying Religion over with them, who would make the Rule as Pliant as the Conscience, and perswade the State that it cannot thrive but upon their own Despicable Trade ; and in order to this, will needs settle the weighty Bulk of Government upon that Rotten Foundation of Self-Sufficiency. But you, Sir, I know, are not to learn your Sentiments of Church or State, either from Dr. *D'avenant* or me ; you have made your self Master of such Notions as will stand the Shock of all his turn'd Periods ; and I am Convinc'd, you are not to be Frighted out of the Church by the Loudest Out-cries he can make. Next, to be *Good*, is to be *Stedfast* ; there cannot be much Vertue without both, and God knows then how little there is amongst

amongst us. But this I must confess is out of my way. I am not apt to Complain while I have before me the Pleasing Idea of a Gentleman, which reminds me frequently of that Noble Character in Horace.

Iustum, & propositi tenacem Virum. &c.

I am, Sir,

Your Most Humble, &c.

FINIS

